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Health Mobilization Series

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THE ROLE OF THE Nurse in National Disaster

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
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Public Health Service

THE ROLE OF THE Nurse in National Disaster

Prepared as
The Role of the Nurse in Disaster
by the Committee on Nursing in
Disaster and National Defense
of the American Nurses' Association.
Approved by the Board of Directors
of the American Nurses' Association.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
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INTRODUCTION

The ANA *Statements of Functions, Standards, and Qualifications for Practice* are important statements because they define, in functional terms, desirable nursing practice. They are a yardstick and a guide by which professional practice and qualifications for practice may be evaluated. Based on research done in the early 1950's by the American Nurses' Association, and contributed to and further refined by thousands of nurses over a 6-year period, the statements are the unified voice of the profession and the basis for sound professional nursing practice.

These statements give evidence of the fact that the practice of professional nursing requires substantial judgment and skill based on knowledge and the application of the principles of the biological, physical, and social sciences. It is also clear from these statements that, in carrying out this practice, the nurse has certain independent functions, namely: observation, care, counseling, maintenance of health, prevention of illness, supervision and teaching of other personnel, as well as such dependent functions as administration of prescribed medications and treatments.

Nurses with the specific knowledge, skills, and qualifications, as stated in the ANA *Statements of Functions, Standards, and Qualifications for Practice*, have the basic preparation for disaster nursing. However, it is essential that they have additional preparation in the adaptation of nursing skills to emergency situations in a disaster environment. Such additional preparation is necessary because of the nature of disaster and the diversified functions nurses are called upon to perform.

Professional nurses must be oriented to, and psychologically prepared for, disaster work. Experience has shown that nurses need thorough preparation to serve under the stress of the chaotic situation that prevails in disasters.

Nurses must have the ability to improvise and to adapt nursing principles to disaster situations. They must be able to accept direction and take orders from organized authority at the community, State and national levels. In disaster operations, nurses will find themselves working in heterogeneous groups of persons with a wide range of preparation, skill and stability. Nurses must develop the attitude that in all disasters they must be able to do "THE BEST FOR THE MOST WITH THE LEAST BY THE FEWEST."

This report was prepared by the 1958-1960 Special Committee on Nursing in National Defense. It was later revised by the 1963-1964 Special Committee on Nursing in National Defense. The members of both committees are listed below.

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PLANNING

A. Classification of Disasters

Disasters may be classified as natural or war-caused.

Natural disasters include epidemics, earthquakes, explosions, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, floods, and transportation accidents.

War-caused disasters result from various weapons systems such as chemical, biological, thermonuclear, psychological, and conventional methods of warfare.

B. Nurses' Responsibility in Natural and War-Caused Disasters

As citizens, nurses have a responsibility to participate in disaster preparedness plans. Professionally, nurses are responsible to society for leadership in planning, organizing, directing, and providing nursing service. Nurses should:

- (1) Be prepared for self-survival and for performing emergency nursing measures.
- (2) Know community disaster plans and organized community health resources.
- (3) Know the meaning of warning signals and the action to be taken in event of enemy attack.
- (4) Know measures for protection from radioactive fallout.
- (5) Know measures for prevention and control of environmental health hazards.
- (6) Be prepared to interpret health laws and regulations.

In natural disasters, immediate and mutual-aid resources are more readily available and can generally be provided in a reasonable length of time; even so, lives may be saved initially by self-help or neighbor-help. In war-caused disasters, survival of the population will depend on self- and neighbor-help because medical aid may be delayed or nonexistent.

The number of victims in a natural disaster is usually manageable, while in a war-caused disaster the sick and injured of the surviving population may far exceed the resources and capabilities of medical and nursing personnel, facilities, supplies, and equipment.

In natural disasters, medical direction and nursing personnel are usually available. In modern warfare, because of the magnitude of

numbers of sick and injured, it is assumed there will be disparity between need and availability of medical and nursing personnel. Nurses will be expected to exercise greater leadership and discerning judgment in:

- (1) Appraisal of patients' conditions for priority of care.
- (2) Care, treatment, and health protection.
- (3) Use of supplies and equipment.
- (4) Utilization of nursing service personnel.
- (5) Detecting changes in the environment and organizing activities for the elimination or modification of health hazards.

Professional nurses and auxiliary nursing personnel often perform their peacetime functions in a natural disaster. The functions may be performed in different settings with much improvisation. In the event of a national crisis, greater numbers of trained and untrained persons will be needed to give essential nursing care under limited supervision. Practical nurses and auxiliary nursing personnel may be allocated some tasks normally performed by professional nurses.

Adequate medical supplies and equipment are usually obtainable in a natural disaster. In a war-caused disaster, stockpiled medical supplies and equipment resources may be destroyed. Emphasis must be placed on economical use of the remaining supplies and equipment and on nursing improvisations.

Professional personnel can be recruited in a reasonable length of time for nursing service in a natural disaster. In a war-caused disaster, additional personnel and replacements may be delayed or nonexistent. Professional nurses are prepared in many special fields of nursing. It would be ideal if assignments could be made according to special skills and competencies, and this should be done if possible. However, assignments will be made initially according to where nurses are and what needs to be done.

C. The Nursing Plan

Nursing plans for disaster should be coordinated with those of other health disciplines and would include provisions for preparation and maximum utilization of professional nurses, nursing students, practical nurses, nursing aides, and volunteers.

D. Functions

Careful study of the ANA *Statements of Functions, Standards, and Qualifications for Practice* indicates that these functions, in their broadest sense, permit additional activities within the limits of professional nursing practice. On the following pages are comparisons that have been made on *only a few of these functions*, showing their extension from a peacetime situation to a natural disaster and a war-caused disaster.

SELECTED FUNCTIONS OF THE NURSE

In Peacetime	In Natural Disasters	In War-Caused Disasters
<p>Function Prepares, administers, and supervises a patient-care plan for each patient in the group for which she is responsible.</p> <p>Explanation The essence of administrative skill is the fullest possible involvement of all concerned with a project in its planning, effectuation, and evaluation. It is assumed that the director, supervisor, or consultant works with and through the staff in carrying out every one of her functions. She also works in a cooperative relationship with other members of the agency staff, and constantly interprets her work both within the agency or institution as a whole and to the public.</p>	<p>Function Prepares, administers, and supervises nursing-care plans for unpredictable numbers of sick and injured for which she may be responsible.</p> <p>Explanation The nurse may be the first and only professional person at the scene of disaster for a limited period of time. She will need to make decisions in which customary methods of carrying out standards of practice are modified through improvisations; professionally ill and injured. Auxiliary personnel are utilized for minor casualties and health problems.</p>	<p>Function Prepares, administers, establishes priorities, and supervises nursing-care plans for large and unpredictable numbers of sick and injured in the surviving population.</p> <p>Explanation The nurse might find herself alone for indeterminate periods of time and will need to make decisions in which customary methods of carrying out standards of practice are compromised with the concept of accomplishing the greatest good for the greatest number. She must accept the concept that many sick and injured of the surviving population will need <i>minimal</i> care but will continue to work; some will need <i>immediate</i> care in order to save life; some can have care <i>delayed</i> without risk to life; and many will be classified as "expectant" survivors and will receive comfort-care only.</p>

The nurse must understand these concepts of sorting and accept the fact that sorting is a continuing process that must be practiced in all treatment areas.

The nurse may be responsible for the operation of treatment and aid stations where physicians are not available.

Example

The nurse:

1. May be the one to make a rapid appraisal of the existing medical and nursing needs.
2. Will need to make appraisal of, and plan for, safest environment for occupants.
3. May have to direct priority and emergency care.
4. Will need to utilize available persons to assist in giving this care.

Function

Performs nursing measures, procedures, and techniques based on application of scientific principles.

Performs therapeutic medical measures in the absence of direct medical supervision.

Example

The nurse will need to make or ascertain an appraisal of the number of sick and injured and to assign appropriate personnel to carry out nursing procedures.

Function

Performs nursing measures, procedures, and techniques based on application of scientific principles.

Performs therapeutic measures delegated by medical authority or initiates therapeutic measures until medical direction is available.

Function

Applies scientific principles in performing nursing procedures and techniques through constant evaluation in the light of nursing and medical progress. Performs therapeutic measures prescribed and delegated by medical authority.

In Peacetime	In Natural Disasters	In War-Caused Disasters
<p><i>Explanation</i></p> <p>It is recognized that today nurses are performing complex therapeutic measures requiring the exercise of a high degree of judgment and the application of scientific principles.</p>	<p><i>Explanation</i></p> <p>In performing therapeutic measures during the absence of medical direction the nurse is expected to use sound judgment in making an immediate appraisal, initiating life-saving and health measures, and in delegating specific duties to appropriate nursing personnel.</p> <p>Standing orders should be available during the absence of medical direction.</p> <p>In carrying out these functions, the nurse, having made an immediate appraisal, will apply scientific principles in performing the specific activities, procedures and techniques as the situation demands.</p> <p>Supplies, equipment, physical facilities and utilities may be limited. The nurse will need to appreciate and understand priority use of all supplies. She will need to know how to improvise, what to use for improvisation, and how to adapt these improvisations to nursing needs.</p> <p>The availability of medical diagnosis and treatment may be limited. The nurse may</p>	<p><i>Explanation</i></p> <p>Patient care will be dependent upon type of attack and where the nurse is. An attempt will be made to follow sound nursing practices. In carrying out this function, the nurse, having made an immediate appraisal, will apply these principles when carrying out the specific activities, procedures, and techniques as the situation demands. Modification of procedures may have to be made to meet the emergency.</p> <p>Within the limits established by the medical profession, the nurse may be expected to exercise her best judgment to initiate life-saving and survival measures.</p> <p>In a war-caused disaster, the nurse must accept and begin with the existing situation, utilizing what is available to accomplish the most good for the greatest number. This will be necessary because of the great disparity between need for and supply of medical personnel. Supplies, equipment, physical facilities and utilities may be limited. The nurse will need to appreciate and understand priority use of all supplies.</p>

need to initiate therapeutic measures to sustain life. Standing orders should be available.

Function

Observes, records, and reports to the appropriate person symptoms, reactions, and progress.

Function

Observes, records, and reports to the appropriate person symptoms, reactions, and progress. Interprets to the appropriate personnel social and physical factors in the environment affecting patient care.

Explanation

The nurse working in a disaster situation needs to be aware of immediate medical, nursing and health needs, and know available resources to meet these needs. It is necessary that the nurse understand the functions of other disaster personnel who have responsibilities in meeting social and environmental needs.

It is imperative that essential data be recorded and kept with the patient so that care at the next level of management may be carried out with full knowledge of condition and previous treatment.

She will need to know how to improvise, what to use for improvisation, and how to adapt these improvisations to nursing needs.

Additional functions normally practiced by the medical profession that the nurse will perform must be determined at the community level based on need.

Function

Observes, records, and reports to the appropriate person, if available, symptoms, reactions, and progress. Interprets to the appropriate authority social and physical factors in the environment affecting patient care.

Explanation

The nurse will need to have developed observation skills to a high degree of acuity so that she will be able to make rapid observations and immediate decisions necessary to initiate emergency treatments. This will include priority nursing care for those with the best chance for survival.

It is imperative that essential data be recorded and kept with the patient so that care at the next level of management may be carried out with full knowledge of condition and previous treatment.

In Peacetime	In Natural Disasters	In War-Caused Disasters
<p>Function Teaches and directs nonprofessional nursing personnel for whom she is assigned responsibility.</p>	<p>Function Teaches and directs nonprofessional nursing personnel for whom she is assigned responsibility.</p> <p>Explanation Sufficient nursing personnel are usually available to give individual nursing care and provide on-the-job training and supervision for auxiliary nursing personnel.</p> <p>The nurse participates in revising procedures and techniques. She exercises sound judgment in improvising and modifying nursing procedures in accordance with the demands of the situation.</p> <p>The nurse supervises work of auxiliary personnel participating in the disaster nursing program. She supervises the work of volunteer workers and assists in their training.</p>	<p>Function Teaches and directs nonprofessional nursing personnel for whom she is assigned responsibility.</p> <p>Explanation Sufficient nursing personnel will not be available to give individual nursing care and they must rely on auxiliary nursing personnel and others to assist in teaching and supervising family members.</p> <p>The nurse exercises sound judgment in improvising and modifying nursing procedures in accordance with the demands of the situation.</p>
<p>Function Participates in planning for, and carries out, nursing responsibilities of the agency's</p>	<p>Function Participates in planning for, and carries out, nursing responsibilities of the agency's</p>	<p>The nurse supervises work of auxiliary personnel participating in the disaster nursing program. She supervises the work of volunteer workers and assists in their training. She provides on-the-job training to meet immediate needs.</p> <p>Function Participates in planning and carrying out nursing phases of the community's survival</p>

sibilities of the agency's program for maternal, child, and adult health; control and prevention of acute, chronic, and communicable diseases; mental health, including psychiatric care; rehabilitation; accident prevention; and occupational health. Helps arrange for and manage clinics and other health service facilities. Prepares nursing budgets and administers the nursing program.

program in conjunction with the community's disaster plan for maternal, child and adult health; control and prevention of acute, chronic, and communicable diseases; mental health, including psychiatric care; rehabilitation; accident prevention; and occupational health. Helps arrange for and manage nursing activities in clinics and shelters. Prepares nursing budgets and administers the nursing program.

Explanation

Many health services may have to be curtailed in order to provide the necessities of survival, which are shelter, water, and food.

Some of the usual health services may become operational, and mutual-aid may be available within a reasonable length of time.

It will be necessary to select activities which will be most effective in preventing illness and disability and in caring for the sick and injured.

plan, such as maternal, child, and adult health; control and prevention of acute, chronic, and communicable diseases; mental health, including psychiatric care; rehabilitation; accident prevention; and occupational health. Helps arrange for and manage emergency health service facilities.

Explanation

Many health services may have to be curtailed in order to provide the necessities of survival, which are shelter, water, and food.

Specialized health workers may not be available; therefore the nurse may be required to assess environmental health hazards and to manage services to meet mass health needs.

It will be necessary to select activities which will be most effective in preventing illness and disability and in caring for the sick and injured.

GLOSSARY

Activities: Single acts such as immobilizing a fracture.

Agency: An organization or institution established for the promotion of a particular object, usually one for some public, educational, charitable, or similar purpose.

Biological Warfare: The intentional use of living organisms or their toxic products to cause death, disability or damage in men, animals or plants.

Chemical Warfare: The intentional use of chemical agents causing death, injury or irritant effects.

Emergency Care: Minimal essential care that is done to meet the emergency.

Function: A broad area of responsibility composed of many activities.

Mutual Aid: Preplanned cooperative effort of all agencies to provide immediate assistance within a community.

Procedure: A method by which an activity is carried out.

Radioactive Fallout: Radioactive particles of dust and debris falling back to earth after a nuclear explosion.

Sorting: The sorting out and classification of the wounded.

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Publications in the Health Mobilization Series are keyed by the following subject categories:

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